

Young People's Societies

TWO VALLEYS.

Topic for Sunday, August 15: Pilgrim's Progress, Series VIII. Two Valleys. Psalm 22:1-8; Micah 7:7, 8; Romans 8:35-39.

DAILY READINGS.

Monday: Humbled by God. Exodus 5:15-23.
 Tuesday: Facing the foe. James 4:5-10.
 Wednesday: The Sword of the Spirit. Ephesians 6:10-18.
 Thursday: The great shadow. Jeremiah 2:6, Romans 8:20-23.
 Friday: Turning back. Hebrews 3:12-19.
 Saturday: The day-break. 1 John 2:8-11.

The Valleys of Humiliation and the Shadow of Death lay in the Pilgrim's path. He must needs pass through them.

"In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation."

"Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth."

Christian could not turn back and then escape the valley of his trial. There was only one way to go. Appollyon met him. The fierce battle began. The shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit must be his reliance.

It was well that he started but a little back from the discourse, counsel and strength of Discretion, Prudence, and Piety. But for them it would have fared worse for him here. The armor they gave him in leaving now served him in good stead.

There was nothing to protect his back. Hence he had always to face his adversary. To have turned would have been fatal. The believer can front only one way. To turn back is to succumb. "There is no discharge in that war."

"Thanks be to God which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

The next valley through which Christian was called was that of the Shadow of Death. A deep ditch lay on one side of the path and a dangerous quag on the other. Thick gloom enveloped it. Its silence and mystery and horror were appalling.

But there is direct comfort even for this passage. "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me." No one is called to walk there alone. "Thou art with me."

No help may be expected by falling into the deep ditch of presumption and unwarranted hope, hope that is not founded in Christ; no relief will be given by yielding hopelessly to the engulfing quag of despair. Neither presumption nor terror will lend any help to the soul. Christ is the way, and keeping in that way is all that will do any good.

"Thou hast turned the shadow of death into morning." "Christ with us" is to lead safely through. He takes the sting from death and the victory from the grave. His own triumph over them is the guarantee of the believer's triumph. What he has done his servant shall, through him, be also able to do.

YOU DID YOUR BEST.

God keeps his best things for the few
 Who dare to stand the test;
 God has his second choice for those
 Who will not have his best.
 I want, among the victor throng,
 To have my name confessed.
 'Tis not thy blessing, Lord, I seek;
 I want thy very best.
 I want to stand, when Christ appears,
 In spotless raiment dressed,
 And hear my Master say to me,
 "Well done! You did your best."

Prayer Meeting

TOPIC—"CHRISTIAN GENEROSITY."

Philemon 1:10-17. Week Beginning August 8.

The design of this short epistle was to secure for one who had been converted under Paul's ministry certain consideration and clemency which it was in the power of a dearly beloved fellow-laborer to bestow. Philemon was a man of love and faith toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints. He had ministered generously to his needy fellow-disciples, and his kind-heartedness and benevolence were well known.

Onesimus was a slave of Philemon, who had probably deserted his master unlawfully and who had formerly been unruly while in servitude. His name signifies "profitable," which suggests to Paul that hitherto he had not been profitable, but that, having become a changed man by his conversion, he would henceforth be profitable to both his master and to Paul.

The Apostle had instructed Onesimus to return to his master, and in this letter he is entreating Philemon to receive him in kindness and to treat him not simply as a returned slave, but as a fellow-Christian, a brother beloved. Such are his claims upon Philemon's compliance that he might have enjoined it, but for love's sake he rather besought his friend to comply. He mentions his mature age and his imprisonment as reasons for showing him this kindness personally.

The Apostle recognizes frankly the rights of Philemon in this case, but his careful explanation of circumstances and the argument, which he so skillfully, yet tenderly, makes as to the effect that it is Christian duty, under certain conditions, to forego rights and to exercise and exhibit a generous spirit toward others, even to the point of substantial sacrifice.

The generosity desired in this case was to be twofold: There was to be forgiveness and the exercise of fraternal feelings, and this state of mind was to find expression in such an outward attitude as would express this state of mind. This is characteristic of genuine generosity always. Much of the mechanical generosity on the part of philanthropists fails to exhibit the fraternal element. It is administered through proxies, and benevolent enterprises become automatic and as stoical as the wheels and levers and gearing of a vast machine. It lacks much of the quality of mercy which blesses both him who gives and him who receives.

It is very suggestive that the Apostle makes so prominent in this short letter of explanation and pleading the qualities of heart and life which are essentially spiritual and exclusively Christian. These qualities receive the emphasis in his carefully framed and courteous introduction. They are dwelt on in recounting the characteristics and services of both of those with whom this epistle is concerned. They are appealed to as the real and sufficient ground for exercise of that generosity for which he pleads. Other considerations are not regarded as being of sufficient substance to form a basis for the principle which he would enforce. Is this not suggestive as to the character of present-day philanthropy? Is not the most important and the essential element of it based on distinctively Christian principles and prompted by Christian motives? Much current benevolence is bestowed on secular libraries, non-Christian universities and schemes of social betterment. It can not be shown that these vast endowments of secular enterprises will be real blessings. They may work injury by making the people materialistic, or reliant for their welfare on the resources of others, or socialistic by gradually assuming that the benefactions which they receive are theirs by right. It is well known that in European countries a large percentage of the population is supported by the charity of those who are masters of large estates or heads of large industrial enterprises. This benevolence, which is dispensed periodically and mechanically, is a kind of peace offering by means of which the populace are induced to be content that the wealthy shall continue to enjoy special privileges from the government and shall absorb, without the menace of a popular revolt, the increasing wealth that commerce and industry are producing. A great general principle may be safely announced, namely: Benevolence, in order to be beneficent, must also be Christian.